

Comments on Transportation Element (Key 6) of Downtown Plan
Ped/Bike/Motor Vehicle Commission Jan. 24, 2012
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Overall, I recommend deferring further consideration of this Plan until after the production of a city-wide transportation plan that has been budgeted for this year. Barring that, I recommend that the transportation elements of this plan be REJECTED. And, since the transportation elements are not only sprinkled throughout, and sometimes even factually incorrect, that means REJECTING the entire plan. I like it that, among other things, the Plan emphasizes the need for at least one inter-city transit terminal. There are good elements in the Plan. But they are far outweighed by bad elements including a lack of vision of what transportation in the downtown area should be in 20 or 30 years. **There is too much emphasis on the continuation of a car culture that has been destroying our city, on short-sighted fixes such as adding parking, and insufficient attention to long-term issues such as having a balanced transportation system or what the consequences would be of having more car traffic. There is insufficient emphasis on sustainability, on turning downtown into a place where people actually live and play, not just work and then go home someplace else.**

The Downtown Plan in its current form ignores the excellent Sustainability Plan that was adopted last year, and can be found at <http://www.cityofmadison.com/sustainability/sustainPlan.cfm>. That plan devotes an entire chapter to transportation. Recommendations from that chapter should be incorporated into the Downtown Plan whenever possible. Plans need to show consistency. When a Comprehensive Plan is inconsistent, it cannot provide a clear guide to future development.

The top five recommendations of the current draft of the Downtown Plan are:

1. Continue to plan for a future high speed passenger rail station **in the vicinity of the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center.**
2. Develop a comprehensive strategy for integrating inter city bus services into the Downtown transportation system.
3. Establish a commuter rail system and other forms of high capacity express transit to better serve Downtown.
4. Preserve the following locations, identified in this Downtown Plan, for rail based transit stations: Union South, West Washington Avenue/Kohl Center, and Monona Terrace; and
5. Expand the Madison Metro bus system to incorporate regional approaches such as bus rapid transit and express bus routes tied to remote park and ride lots.

Would you consider that an articulate call for a more balanced transportation system? Are these what you'd think are your top five recommendations? My top five recommendations would be:

1. Ask that all major institutions and businesses, all new developments, and all big events, downtown **have Transportation Demand Management Plans** that look for reasonable alternatives to travelling by Single Occupancy Vehicles. This is one of the recommendations of the Sustainability Plan and is a reasonable addition to the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Rather than calling a mediocre transit system excellent, used by all of 10% of workers downtown, **make the transit system excellent**, one that people prefer to use over driving. Again, the Sustainability Plan outlined steps that should have been incorporated here. Without going into too much detail, that means that:
 - a. there should be no fare for travelling around downtown (using a circulator);

- b. travelling by bus should be safe;
 - c. focus should be on improving bus service, not on putting in commuter rail stations;
 - d. Travelling by bus should be convenient, with core service running 24 hours a day, every day of the week, at least every 20-30 minutes to accommodate 2nd- and 3rd-shift workers, as well as 1st-shift workers, while Commuter service during peak hours should run at least every 10 minutes;
 - e. There should be express service that makes bus riding time-competitive with the automobile for a significant proportion of the population.
3. Turn the current system in which 70% of downtown workers get to their jobs by car on its head. Just to throw out one possible scenario, I'd recommend that 10% drive Single Occupancy Vehicles, 20% ride share, 20% ride bikes, 20% walk and 30% ride the bus.
 4. Establish an intermodal depot for intercity and local transit. The old one should never have been let go in the first place.
 5. Reduce the speed limit on many downtown streets to 5-10 MPH to discourage car travel and encourage safe walking and bicycle use.

Other recommendations are:

6. **Leave parking policy to the zoning code.** It is not helpful to have potentially contradictory elements in our overall Comprehensive Plan.
7. **Resuscitate the former ad hoc committee mandated to come up with a regional parking strategy**
The committee that existed at one time never issued a final report of any kind, and we desperately need one. We need to get a proper handle on identifying the true costs and benefits of parking if we are to address parking intelligently in a Downtown Plan.
8. **Separate out (unbundle) the cost of parking from other costs** so people can see how much parking really costs – rental units that include parking should charge separately for the cost of that parking stall. If renters knew that a significant portion of their rent was going to pay for parking, they might well opt out of having a parking stall. Why should people who walk, ride bikes or take transit, and use something such as Community Car when they drive, pay for the parking that might come with their residential unit? Shouldn't they be able to opt out? My suspicion is that plans for so much new underground parking are devoid of any serious understanding of the cost. Plans need to be guided by a true appraisal of costs and benefits, something not possible now.
9. **Stop taking away bus stops for more parking;** Encourage bus use and discourage car use, not the other way around.
10. Have the city create a position for a **Transportation and Parking Demand Management Director** to manage our assets – I have an example from Cambridge, MA that could help serve as a template;
11. **Re-evaluate the need for an inter-city train terminal downtown.** Recommendations for its location at the airport were based on thoughtful appraisals while I personally favor the Yahara site. In general, there was insufficient consideration of all the factors involved in locating an intercity train terminal because WisDOT felt compelled to make a decision in a hurry. We are under no such hurry now so the Plan should not embrace a premature and hurried decision.
12. **.Be less vague about having decent shuttle service** both around downtown itself and between downtown and the airport. Many hotels already have private services that could be expanded, and my experience at Monona Terrace suggests visitors are not even informed about the bus service that *does* exist.